

»It is really important that EU legislation is enforced by individual nations so that companies have a level playing field.«

Björn Hansen
Director of the European
Chemicals Agency, Helsinki

“The most ambitious chemicals regulation in the world”

The European Chemicals Agency ECHA carefully checks and evaluates all legally required company information concerning chemicals. ECHA Director Björn Hansen explains why this improves safety and what still needs to be done.

In what way does the registration of chemicals with ECHA contribute to chemical safety?

In the European Union (EU), companies are responsible for ensuring that the chemicals they use are safe. They must register chemicals that they produce or import into Europe in quantities of one ton or more. In the registration documentation they must provide us with information on the properties, exposure and safe use of these substances. At present, more than 22,000 substances are registered with us. We publish most of this information on our website. It contains the world's largest regulatory chemicals database available for use.

How is ECHA dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic?

ECHA is committed to helping industries meet their legal obligations during the COVID 19 pandemic. We are doing this in close cooperation with the European Commission and other EU bodies. And, of course, in compliance with our duty to protect citizens and the environment. To increase the production and supply of disinfectants on the European market, we support the countries and companies of the EU and the European Economic Area. We understand that companies may currently lack the human and financial resources to meet certain deadlines that affect our decisions, or they may be facing technical difficulties. ECHA has therefore decided to extend the deadlines in a number of cases.

The REACH chemicals regulation has been in force since 2007. What do you consider to be the biggest achievements and challenges?

We know more about the chemicals used in the EU today than ever before. We also have the most ambitious chemicals regulation in the world, which is used as a benchmark by other countries. This is a clear success. However, REACH obligations continue beyond the registration deadlines. We see serious

compliance issues in the data that companies provide us with. When we examine registration documents, we find that many do not meet the requirements. But when we approach companies with our decisions, most of them update their documentation. To address chemical risks, we need to speed up the risk management of chemicals and carry out more group assessments.

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How can we ensure that the most dangerous substances are regulated efficiently? How can we harmonize the EU chemicals regulatory framework on the one hand with member states' legislation and practice on the other?

The main European chemicals legislation - REACH, CLP, PIC, POPs, the Biocides Regulation - are rules that apply in a similar way

in all EU member states. It is really important that these laws are enforced nationally so that companies have a level playing field. ECHA has an enforcement forum where national enforcement authorities coordinate implementation projects in a harmonized way.

What are the challenges ahead in terms of chemical safety, compliance and a climate-neutral EU?

The EU's Green Deal has made it clear that chemicals will play a key role in achieving Europe's ambitious political agenda for 2020 and beyond. For example: A closed loop economy can only be achieved by using the right sustainable chemicals, making materials recyclable and avoiding negative impacts on health and the environment. Our priorities are to efficiently deal with the most hazardous chemicals, manage their risks and ensure that safe chemicals remain solutions for implementing the Green Deal.



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